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28 March 1975

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MEMORANDUM FOR: OSR/ER/MEA

SUBJECT : Arms Deliveries to Syria

Attached is the submission requested by your office on military equipment deliveries to Syria since 6 October 1973, for use in the Interagency Intelligence Memorandum, Syria Strengthens Its Armed Forces. An information copy is also being provided to [redacted] the NIO for the Middle East.

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[redacted] Acting Chief
Trade and Aid Branch
Office of Economic Research

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Attachment:
As stated

Distribution: (S- 08518)

Orig. & 1 - Addressee

1 - DD/OER; D/OER; SA/ER
2 - St/P/C (1-CRS)
1 - Ch/D/D
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25X1

OER/D/D/TA [redacted]

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25X1

Submission: Interagency Intelligence Memorandum
Syria Strengthens Its Armed Forces

Syria

Damascus remains almost completely dependent on the USSR for its military hardware. Moscow, in turn, continues to focus its Middle East military aid diplomacy on Syria. Soviet arms deliveries to Syria in 1974 -- valued at \$435 million -- were the most sent to any of Moscow's Third World clients, and represented 37% of total deliveries.

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Most of the Soviet weaponry is being integrated directly into the Syrian armed forces.

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As a result of the 1973 conflict, Damascus determined that larger quantities and more advanced combat equipment would be required if war with Israel were to break out again. Soviet deliveries in 1974 not only completed the replacement of Damascus's war losses but also enabled air and ground forces to be expanded and up-graded. In May 1974, Syria became the first country to receive the supersonic MIG-23 jet fighter. Counting new MIG-21 and SU-7 deliveries, Syria now has about 475 jet fighters in its inventory -- the largest fighter aircraft force in the Middle East. However, Syria suffers from a shortage of proficient pilots. Moreover, needs for more and better maintenance and support technicians will denegrate capabilities either to defend effectively against deep penetration raids by Israeli aircraft or to provide adequate ground attack support.

Soviet land armament deliveries in the last 18 months have included some 800 T-62 tanks. Consequently, Syria's ground forces are now better equipped than they were at the beginning of the October War. In some ways, such as tank gunnery, they also are better trained. Advanced weaponry received by the Syrian Army included FROG-7 rocket launchers -- the first ones appeared in early 1973, and the SCUD surface-to-surface missile system. These tactical artillery systems extend substantially Syria's long-range artillery capability.

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Syrian air defenses have been up-graded since the October War. Ten surface-to-air missile batteries [redacted] 25X1 [redacted] have been added and the vehicle-mounted SA-7 tactical surface-to-air missile system has been introduced.

During the last 18 months, East European countries have supplied only nominal amounts of military equipment, probably less than 10% of total Communist deliveries to Syria. Equipment includes jet aircraft engines, tanks, APCs, small arms, and explosives. Czechoslovakia has been the largest single supplier.

Moscow will remain Syria's major arms supplier. Damascus can be expected to pursue recent initiatives with the UK, France, and West Germany, although a deal for major weapons systems is unlikely while Middle Eastern tensions are unabated. Syria has concluded small contracts with the West for logistics and communications equipment, and will continue to negotiate for support equipment which it cannot obtain from the USSR or Eastern Europe. Syria likely would get equipment from the inventories of other Arab countries, particularly if a new conflict erupts. Iraq, Algeria, and Libya might transfer some Soviet and Western equipment as would Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, each of which are up-grading air and ground force inventories.

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